



King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1080/09612025.2016.1163924](https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2016.1163924)

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Mukherjee, S. (2016). The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931: Indian women and their leadership of a pan-Asian feminist organisation. *Women's History Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2016.1163924>

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

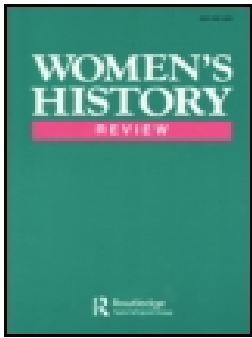
General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931: Indian women and their leadership of a pan-Asian feminist organisation

Sumita Mukherjee

To cite this article: Sumita Mukherjee (2016): The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931: Indian women and their leadership of a pan-Asian feminist organisation, Women's History Review

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2016.1163924>



© 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 21 Jun 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931: Indian women and their leadership of a pan-Asian feminist organisation

Sumita Mukherjee

Department of History, King's College London, UK

ABSTRACT

In January 1931, the All-Asian Women's Conference (AAWC) convened in Lahore. Forty-five female delegates met to discuss common social and political concerns of women in Asia, such as infant mortality, suffrage, education and rights of inheritance. Organised by Indian women, along with the Irish Theosophist Margaret Cousins, the AAWC spoke to visions of pan-Asianism that were reflected by male Indian nationalists at the time. Keen to counteract the Euro-American centrism of international women's organisations, Asian women discussed the ways they could organise together. This article analyses the rhetoric within the conference, through its reports, correspondence and international newspapers and periodicals. It discusses the ways pan-Asianism was conceived by Indian women in the 1930s and explains why there was only ever one meeting of the AAWC.

Introduction

In January 1931, a group of thirty-six Asian women met in the Indian city of Lahore to discuss common social and political concerns. The All-Asian Women's conference (AAWC) was an attempt to cement regular meetings between Asian women and to forge a pan-Asian feminist organisation. It was the first pan-Asian women's conference of its kind. It was organised primarily by Indian women, though early direction came from the Irish feminist Margaret Cousins. Indian male nationalists often attempted to forge pan-Asian alliances in this period, but there has been little consideration of the ways in which women collectively organised across the continent in this period. The position of women was rarely invoked by Asian intellectuals who were inspired by the idealism of an Asian civilisation bound together by cultural exchange and political opportunity. How did women from Asia either adopt or adapt these expressions in their own struggles for equality domestically and internationally? Similarly, while there has been considerable reflection on the transnational and global organising of women in this period, notably by Leila Rupp and more recently by Marie Sandell, the focus has generally been on Euro-American-centric organisations such as the International Alliance of Women or

CONTACT Sumita Mukherjee, ✉ sumita.mukherjee@kcl.ac.uk 📍 Department of History, King's College London S8.05, Strand, London WC2R 2LS, UK.

© 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

International Council of Women.¹ June Hannam, Mrinalini Sinha, Donna Guy and Angela Woollacott have all called for more analysis of the international links of feminism away from these western centres.² The AAWC is a perfect case study for interrogating the dialogues on feminism within a pan-Asian context.

The desire to form a pan-Asian women's association was indicative of the new internationalism of the interwar period. Although European powers continued to hold empires and subject peoples around the world to colonial oppression in this era, imperialism was becoming internationalised and decentralised in this period. This new outlook, as Daniel Gorman has argued, was exemplified by the foundation of the League of Nations, but also evident in the increased number of international NGOs and the expansion of transnational civil society.³ Simultaneously, many men and women looked to form new alliances that decentred global networks away from the west.⁴ For example, the Japanese Pan-Asian Society convened a Pan-Asian Conference in 1920 and there was an Afro-Asian Conference held in Delhi in 1929.⁵ The Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore forged close intellectual links with Japan and China in this period, keen to discuss the ways a Pan-Asian unity and 'Eastern' civilisation would 'regenerate' the world against the inevitable decline that would come through western modernity.⁶ Inspired by the success of Meiji Japan, a number of Indian men travelled to Japan for further education and technological training, while other Indians looked to South-East Asia, where a high proportion of ethnically Indian men and women had migrated for work, to find unity across bonds of Islamism.⁷ Influenced by the organisational reach of the Comintern, Jawaharlal Nehru and the Indian National Congress attempted to cement Asian bonds through the League Against Imperialism, and Indian trade unions organised together through associations such as the Pan-Pacific Trade Union and the Asiatic Labour Congress, while ideas about an all-Asian army were put forward by men such as the revolutionary nationalist Raja Mahendra Pratap.⁸ Yet, as Indians conceptualised and grappled with the 'nation' and nationalism in this period, complicated by the regional, ethnic, religious and caste diversity within the subcontinent itself, visions of pan-Asian unity did not gain much traction. Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tiné, citing John Steadman, have argued that 'Asia' had no clear definition in this period and that it came out of a continuum of various collective identities.⁹ This lack of definition, I will argue, was also evident in the AAWC.

Much of the focus on international networking by women in this period was related to the fight for female suffrage. As Louise Edwards and Mina Roces have asserted, from its inception, 'women's struggle for the vote was explicitly global'.¹⁰ Women in various Asian countries were engaged in this struggle in the interwar period, although the AAWC was not solely interested in suffrage. Ellen DuBois has explained how suffrage movements around the world had been internationalist, relying on the co-operation of women of various nations and the influence they had on each other. Although early impetus came from Australia, Europe and North America, the dynamic of international suffragism shifted in the 1920s and 1930s towards Latin America, the Middle East and Asia.¹¹ Anti-colonial nationalism provided the major crucible for emerging feminist networks in these areas and so most of the scholarship has concentrated on 'national' experiences, including Kumari Jayawardena's important book on feminisms in the 'third world', published in 1986.¹² Similarly, Edwards and Roces' volume on women's suffrage in Asia, and their subsequent collection on women's movements in Asia, published as recently as

2010, engage in transnational perspectives but all contributions consider these topics in relation to single 'nations'.¹³ Roces has suggested that feminists in Asian countries sought to accentuate the unique nature of their 'national essence feminism' as opposed to the homogenous sense of 'Western feminism'.¹⁴ In light of these emphases, the AAWC and ideas of pan-Asian feminism have received little scholarly attention. This article seeks to redress this gap in studies of transnational feminism by focusing on a pan-Asian initiative, although the focus is primarily on the Indian women who led the organisation.

In the case of India, most of the literature on female activism related to international organising has centred round three main Indian women's organisations, the Women's Indian Association, the All-India Women's Conference and the National Council of Women in India, which was a branch of the International Council of Women. Although these Indian women had very strong connections with British feminists, they also forged autonomous connections with women removed from this traditional imperial relationship.¹⁵ The National Council of Women in India had its own affiliate branch in Burma, Indian women had been engaged with Ceylonese suffragists, and it was the All-India Women's Conference who hosted the AAWC in Lahore in 1931. Despite these connections, I discuss the particular vision of Asian feminist solidarity that the Indian organisers of the AAWC put forward, one I argue that was based on a notion of a 'Greater India' that did not give space to competing visions of Asian identity and experience in the interwar period. Despite the name, the AAWC was primarily an Indian, rather than 'Asian', enterprise. This article will consider the influence Margaret Cousins had in the formation of the AAWC first, before discussing this 'Greater India' ideology. It then examines the activities of the AAWC executive before and after the 1931 Conference, to explain this Indian dominance in more detail and the wider impact, if any, of the AAWC.

Margaret Cousins and Asian womanhood

Margaret Cousins was instrumental in setting up the Women's Indian Association in 1917 and the All-India Women's Conference in 1927, as well the AAWC. Having been a member of the Irish suffrage movement, Cousins moved to India in 1915 with her husband James, and immediately became involved in social reform activities to improve the position of Indian women. She was one of the driving forces behind a 'Ladies' Deputation' to the Viceroy and Secretary of State in November 1917 demanding equal suffrage for Indian women. She then led successful campaigns to enfranchise women in the provinces of Madras and Bombay in 1921.¹⁶ A Theosophist, Cousins was greatly interested in 'Asian' spiritual traditions. The Theosophists borrowed from a synthesis of elements drawn from Christianity, the Freemasons, Buddhism and Hinduism, Victorian spiritualism and science; had been linked to the Hindu reformist society the Arya Samaj, but were also successfully instrumental in promoting ideas of 'Asian' unity.¹⁷ Cousins was eager, as Catherine Candy has argued, that Indians should consolidate Asia as a cultural bloc by promoting their spiritual natures as a counter to western modernity.¹⁸

In 1922 Cousins published *The Awakening of Asian Womanhood* in which she discussed the symbolic unity of Asian womanhood in their desire for 'freedom', in their self-determination and their independent initiative. She demonstrated the need for a pan-Asian women's association, as she acknowledged that there was little

intercommunication between women in Asia, suggesting that Indian women knew more about the activities of British and American women than Chinese.¹⁹ However, Cousins did employ stereotypical imagery to describe Asian women. She explained that as a consequence of the climate 'the physique of eastern women has remained undeveloped' and that Asian women had the 'characteristics of shyness, modesty and timidity hard to find in women at present in other parts of the world'.²⁰ Although she extended 'Asia' to the western point of Palestine, she failed to mention any Southeast Asian countries, or consider the history of non-British empires in the region. Cousins also privileged Indian experiences over other Asians. As some Indian women, in the states of Madras, Bombay, Travancore, Cochin and Jhalwar, had been granted the right to vote, generally based on ownership of property, by 1921, Cousins was optimistic that 'one day the women of India will lead the women of the East in all public movements'. Despite acknowledging that Burmese women had been granted the right to vote in 1921, that Chinese suffragettes had been involved in militant activities and that Japanese women had started a branch of the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom, her focus was firmly on Indian female leadership in the region, owing largely to her experiences living in India.²¹

During the 1920s, Cousins contributed regular articles in a series on 'Women at Home and Abroad' to *New India*, an English-language newspaper published in Bombay and edited by Annie Besant. In November 1923, Cousins discussed 'Asia's contribution to World-Sisterhood' with similar remarks to those in *The Awakening of Asian Womanhood*, precipitating her desire to form a pan-Asian women's organisation. 'There is very little international knowledge and real friendship between the various Asian peoples', she explained, though they were once linked through Buddhism and now able to communicate through the English language. Acknowledging the work of the League of Asian peoples, and the YMCA and YWCA in bringing together Asian women, Cousins mentioned the work of the Russian Madame de Manziarly who was travelling through Asia, having spent time in India and linking Indian women with women in Tokyo, Kyoto, Seoul, Peking and Shanghai 'bringing the message of Asian Sisterhood and World Sisterhood to the women in every large city'. A 'time must soon come', posited Cousins, 'when the needs of Asia as the exponent of Eastern civilisation will force her peoples ... into much closer friendly relationships with one another', suggesting that women in particular would be pivotal in these collaborations.²²

Cousins had also been inspired to found the AAWC after visiting the Pan-Pacific Women's Association (PPWA) conference in Hawaii in 1928. She had felt disappointed by the lack of 'spiritual ascension' visible in the conference, which inspired her to mobilise for an All-Asian equivalent.²³ In December 1929, Cousins sent out letters to various parts of Asia and beyond to cultivate interest. She argued that there was a need to preserve the 'oriental' qualities of Asia and it was essential Asian women meet face to face to become 'self-conscious' of their 'spiritual gifts'. Cousins argued that a conference of Asian women was essential for organising and making available the 'oriental gifts of spiritual consciousness'. Cousins' letter also explained why Indian women should take the lead in organising this conference, citing the experience of Indian leadership in the All-Indian Women's Conference, and argued further that India was the 'foster mother of Asia's cultures'. She went on to state that an All-Indian committee would be formed and that Indian women would send out a letter of invitation to the planned conference.²⁴

On 12 March 1930, a circular invitation to the AAWC was issued by Indian women suggesting dates in January 1931. Fourteen Indian women signed the official invitation, including Sarojini Naidu, Muthulakshmi Reddi, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Lady Abdul Quadir, Lakshmibai Rajwade and Rustomji Faridoonji.²⁵ These women were all members of the All-India Women's Conference and were well known social activists in India. Naidu and Kaur were close colleagues of the nationalist leader M. K. Gandhi. The dates for the AAWC were chosen so that it could sit between the two Pan-Pacific Women's Conferences planned for Hawaii in August 1930 and China in 1932. It was also planned to immediately follow the All-India Women's Conference meeting in the same month and location (Lahore) to help with issues of organisation and the availability of Indian delegates. Despite initiating the groundwork for the AAWC, Cousins was not keen to preside over its organisation. She was eager that Indian women assert themselves while retaining their distinctness in contrast to the 'immodesty of the overwesternized Western woman'.²⁶ Thus, though she had a prominent role in the initiation of the AAWC, she was influenced by notions of the spiritual nature of Indian women and her knowledge of their organisational experience, and so Cousins wanted Indian women to take charge from this stage forward.

The Greater India ideology among Indian women

'Greater India' ideas were evident in AAWC rhetoric. Exemplified by the foundation of the Greater India Society in 1925, visions of a 'Greater India' became the basis for much of the pan-Asian ideology in this period. In the face of British imperialism, Indians looked to assert themselves intellectually. They attempted to reclaim past glories of Indian civilisation and looked beyond its territorial boundaries to argue that India had given birth to various Asian philosophies. These ideas were similar to those used by Indian nationalists who argued that there had been a Golden Vedic age of Indian civilisation before successive waves of colonisation. Proponents of a 'Greater India' celebrated notions of Indian cultural imperialism and made a claim to Indian cultural superiority over their neighbours. Buoyed by these beliefs, they felt confident to assert the need for Indian leadership in the region.²⁷ However, they failed to recognise diverse subaltern perspectives from the region. As Susan Bayly has argued, Greater India's points of reference were 'unabashedly Oriental', though they were decidedly not deferential to the British; many were ardent Hindu nationalists.²⁸ Pan-regional identities were not unique to India; there were parallel pan-Islamic and pan-African movements, as well as Japanese ideas of Greater Asia. As Prasenjit Duara has explained, broader pan-Asianism in this period was not only based upon abstract and essentialised notions of culture and civilisation, rather than drawing upon the actual encounters Asian people had, it also had a 'lethally close relationship' with nationalism.²⁹

From inception through to its proceedings, the AAWC was a vehicle for Indian women to voice their ideas and vision of an Indian-centred Asia. In considering the dominant leadership of Indian women, Stephen Hay's argument about why Indian intellectuals had a stronger belief in the 'East' than the Japanese or Chinese in the 1920s applies to the AAWC. Hay has argued that Indian pride in being 'Eastern' was necessary to compensate the educated elite for the humiliation they felt at being (still) subjects of the British Empire, thus they had a psychological need to hold on to an idealised concept of the 'East' to counter western power and influence. Many of the Indian men most enthusiastic about

Asian revivalism had spent years living in Europe or America, and so through their extended contact with the 'West' had increasingly looked to Eastern alternatives to resolve the tensions and contradictions they felt in their own upbringings.³⁰ Indian women had relatively extensive involvement with their western counterparts prior to 1930 compared to other Asian women, were also involved in travel to international conferences in Europe, and in their continuous reminder of both imperial and patriarchal subjection, were equally inspired to assert some form of authority by looking towards an Asian federation.

Birendra Prasad has argued that the idea for an Asiatic federation and the conference came directly out of Indian nationalist thought. The Indian National Congress had directed its working committee to correspond with leaders of other Asian countries in 1928 with view to convene a Pan-Asiatic conference in India in 1930. This did not take place, as Congress became embroiled in various domestic preoccupations. A Pan-Asiatic Labour Conference was held in Colombo in Ceylon in May 1934, but only Japan, India and Ceylon participated, and so the AAWC was actually the most successful Indian attempt in this period to foster Asian solidarity through a federation format.³¹ The inspiration for Indian women did not solely come from domestic, imperial experiences though. Indian women had been attending international conferences since at least 1920.³² They had observed how focus was often on their appearance and clothing rather than other cultural attributes, and their dependence on British women became evident in international meetings, owing to their lack of national independence, so they were looking at ways to assert themselves. It was this 'embattled and precarious national consciousness' that had galvanised a drive towards internationalism in a new direction.³³

It should be noted that the models of international associations for women, such as the International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, were dominated by socially elite women. As Leila Rupp has shown, it was only women who had the leisure time and independent means to travel and take part in activities who could do so. The Indian women involved in the AAWC came from similarly elite backgrounds. Naidu and Kaur had been educated in Britain, Reddi and Rajwade were both qualified doctors, Kaur and Rajwade were members of royal families, and Lady Qadir and Lady Hydari were married to men who had been knighted by the British Government. However, these international organisations also spurred Indian women to prove themselves on the international stage. Western feminists commonly assumed that they were best placed to provide global leadership, accentuating difference such as literacy levels or the purdah system in India. It was the assumptions made about 'Eastern ways' by these organisations, which they had used to justify western leadership, that led to women in 'Eastern' countries to insist that they could represent themselves and confront feminist Orientalism.³⁴

There were other attempts to organise women along regional lines in this period to compete with the triennial conferences convened by the Euro-American led International Alliance of Women (IAW) including the 'Eastern Women's Congresses' in 1930 and 1932 in the Middle East.³⁵ In 1928 the Pan-Pacific Women's Conference was first held in Honolulu, out of which the PPWA was founded in 1930. Emerging out of work between American feminists and various ethnicities that were found in Hawai'i, the PPWA extended to Polynesians, Japanese and Chinese women beyond Hawai'i.³⁶ Its focus was primarily related to the struggles women of various races and ethnicities had with American

'imperialism'. Indian women were invited as special guests, as though they resided outside of the Pacific region they were seen as a major element of the 'Orient'.³⁷ With competing loyalties, geographical and strategic coalitions, and different symbols of opposition, the Pan-Pacific configuration was not necessarily a direct competitor to the pan-Asian one, but did highlight the different allegiances and political concerns that women in Asia had, particularly Japanese women who were more invested in the PPWA than the AAWC. Fiona Paisley has argued that the success of the PPWA lay in the involvement of a broad range of non-western women and the self-conscious internationalism and anti-racism they invested in, though there were inevitable fractures.³⁸ As Marie Sandell has drawn out, the PPWA was a western-dominated venture while the AAWC was led by Asian women. However, as Sandell acknowledges, it was only Indians who were leading the AAWC.³⁹

Evidence of the 'Greater India' ideology among Indian women is seen in their relationship with one of their closest neighbours, Burma, and is indicative of the ways in which non-Indian women found little space to be heard in the AAWC. Burma was governed as a province of British India until 1937, and Burmese women had a close relationship with Indian women. Rameshwari Nehru, editor of the Hindi women's journal *Stri Darpan*, was invited to Rangoon in the 1910s to help establish women's organisations.⁴⁰ In 1919, when the Government of India Bill was passed and the right to enfranchise women was delegated to the provinces, Burma quickly used this ability to enfranchise women on the same terms as men, although women could not run for election.⁴¹ Cousins had visited Burma too. In 1926 the National Council of Women in Burma (NCWB) was set up as an affiliate of the National Council of Women in India, itself a unit of the International Council of Women, and membership consisted of European, Burmese and Indian women living in Burma. Members of the NCWB were represented on the central executive of the Indian Council.⁴² Burmese women were also invited to attend the Pan-Pacific Women's Conference in Honolulu in 1928 but were unable to attend as they were not given enough notice.⁴³

One Burmese woman was on the AAWC committee from 1931 to 1933. May Oung, also known as Daw Mya Sein, attended the AAWC at Lahore and presided over a session. She had experience of Indian women's committees having sat on the executive of the National Council of Women in India as their Burmese member. Oung was appointed secretary of the Liaison Committee of the AAWC that was formed at the 1931 Conference. She was then chosen by Cousins to represent the AAWC at the League of Nations in July 1931, as an alternate to Muthulakshmi Reddi, on a Women's Consultative Committee on Nationality. The other AAWC representative was Dr Rosa Welt Straus from Palestine, a member of the Palestine Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association.⁴⁴

Oung consistently argued that Burmese women had always, historically, enjoyed economic equality with men.⁴⁵ At the Burmese Round Table, which she attended in London in 1931, she further asserted that Burmese women enjoyed greater social and economic independence than Indian women.⁴⁶ International organisations such as the British Commonwealth League and the International Women's Suffrage Alliance argued, in correspondence with the India Office, that Burmese women enjoyed equal economic and legal rights to property as Burmese men.⁴⁷ As Chie Ikeya has shown, there was a perception that women in Burma and Southeast Asia had traditionally enjoyed 'high status'.⁴⁸

Contrasts were made with the lower position of Indian women. However, despite these claims to greater experience of equality, Oung and other non-Indian women were unable to gain much control over the AAWC. The cultural and historical specificity of that region was clearly discussed outside of the AAWC, but not within the conference or its related communications, as will be exemplified in the next section. Similarly the diversity of Indian experiences, though AAWC committee members came from Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Parsee backgrounds, were not highlighted. It was, perhaps, easier to focus on unifying attributes, even if they were based on Orientalist assumptions of Asia, than highlight differences which might fracture the organisation. Therefore, despite attempts to assert Asian distinctiveness and challenge western impressions of Asian women as homogenously backward, these Indian women presented a limited definition of Asia, based on Indian nationalist ideas. They were as guilty of homogenising perceptions of Asia as the Euro-American feminists leading other international organisations.

The All-Asian Women's Conference in Lahore

Invitations to the AAWC had extended to women from thirty-three Asian countries, as it had been defined by the conference. This included Georgia, Palestine, Iraq, Syria as well as Malaya, Indo-China, Siam and Hawaii. The conference was conducted in English, but there had been provisions made for it to be supplemented by Arabic, Urdu and French.⁴⁹ Though advertised widely, only nineteen delegates attended in addition to seventeen Indian delegates and nine foreign visitors (including Cousins). These delegates were from Afghanistan, Burma, Ceylon, Japan and Persia and visitors from America, Britain, Java and New Zealand, a total of forty-five official participants. The AAWC committee were pleased to have secured the attendance of women from ten different countries, comparing this achievement favourably to the first Pan-Pacific Women's Conference which only had attendees from eight different countries.⁵⁰ There was no record of women from Java or Burma attending any other international women's conferences in this period; but despite Sandell's assertions that regional women's associations, like the AAWC, were better at integrating women from the non-West than Euro-American centric women's organisations, this Conference was extremely limited in its Asian reach.⁵¹ The American women's paper, *Equal Rights*, on reporting on the conference failed to realise the lack of equal representation, claiming that it was 'attended by outstanding women from every country in Asia'.⁵² Ruth Woodsmall, an American Christian surveyor who attended the AAWC, did identify the disparity remarking that the conference was 'not truly representative of Asia, since China was not represented and Japan only by a young student' though she was hopeful that it was just a start for future collaborations.⁵³ Cousins, meanwhile, was most disappointed by the lack of delegates from 'Western Asia'.⁵⁴ Although it is not clear why more Asian women did not attend, and expenses were clearly an issue, the lack of interest from some recipients can point to some aversion to the aims of the organisation.

Despite Cousins' leadership, she was not the only person interested or invested in the AAWC. As mentioned above, it was Indian women who had put their name to the circular invitation that was subsequently publicised across the world. This letter suggested that it was time for 'Oriental women' from 'our common Continent' to develop a 'spirit of Asian sisterhood' to preserve and review their common heritage in the face of 'tides of Western

influence'.⁵⁵ Although the letter explained that they would look to discriminate the best features from outside Asia as well, the organisers were keen to accentuate Orientalist understandings of Asia discussing its premodern characteristics and shared spiritual values. A bulletin published in November 1930, signed by the Indian committee, once the location and dates had been confirmed, set out the six objectives for the Conference. They included promoting consciousness among Asian women of their 'common oriental culture' and to preserve certain Oriental qualities (simplicity, philosophy, art, cult of the family, veneration for motherhood, spiritual consciousness). It stated that the Conference was essential to share experiences and also to discuss appropriate Occidental influences Asian women should take on (education, dress, freedom of movement, cinema, machinery). The bulletin also acknowledged that there were specific issues for Asian women that they needed to discuss and combat (ill-health, illiteracy, poverty and underpayment of labour, infant mortality, marriage customs).⁵⁶

A preview of the conference in the British journal *The Indian Magazine and Review*, edited by Jessie Duncan Westbrook for the National Indian Association, a British organisation for people interested in India, provided a supportive view of pan-Asian womanhood, inspired by the circular letter of invitation. Pointing out that 'Oriental women' were influenced by various western relationships, the journal suggested that the women of Asia should continue to meet together to discuss their unique problems and thus by highlighting their 'fundamental difference from women of other lands' come to solve their difficulties.⁵⁷ The invitation circular had explained that the "'oriental" best expresses the quality of Asia', calling up quietness, simplicity and agriculture as opposed to the industrial attributes of the West, and that Asian women were inherently concerned with the family, children and their vocation as 'race nourishers'.⁵⁸ The AAWC was trying to forge new networks that were removed from imperial connections but often in its self-orientalising language failed to appreciate some of the modern achievements and diverse activities outside of the purview of India. Thus, the AAWC projected a view of Asia that did not fully consider the technological advances of Asian countries such as Japan. Further, in suggesting that all Asian countries venerated motherhood they failed to recognise the veneration of fatherhood and the subservient figure of the mother in authoritarian Japanese society.

The Rani of Mandi, the daughter of the ruler of Kapurthala State, where the Conference was being held, gave a welcome address that called on delegates to take the best qualities from both Oriental civilisation and the West, and to reject the perception that women in Asia were mute or helpless ornaments. She explained that Asian women shared similar domestic and social conditions, shaped by customs and traditions, and shared a longing for change.⁵⁹ There were certainly ways in which Asian women could productively convene and the AAWC did not have to be a one-off. However, the Indian leadership more broadly presented a perception of Asia that was either based upon notions of a greater India or Orientalist stereotypes. As Lakshmibai Rajwade, a trained medical doctor and honorary organising secretary of the conference, put it in her preface to the conference report, the organisers felt the conference was necessary to bring about a 'keener realisation of their cultural unity'. Rajwade mentioned the 'self-realization' and 'common awakening' that was taking place in the Orient. She talked about Asia coming into her own and the spiritual and peaceful attributes of the region, beyond national borders.⁶⁰ This homogenizing idea of Asian spirituality and cultural unity was at odds

with the nationalist dialogues of various countries within the region, such as Chinese nationalism, or consideration of the expansionist tendencies of Japanese imperialism, or different cultural influences in places such as French Indochina. Further, the preliminary letter sent out to gauge interest had discussed how India was the 'foster mother' of Asia's cultures, hosting Islam, Buddhism and Aryans. The AAWC conference was opened with a Vedic hymn and it presented a vision of Asian spirituality, most closely allied with Buddhism, certain strands of Hinduisim and non-violence. There was little consideration of the 'spiritual' diversity of the region, within and beyond India.⁶¹

Sarojini Naidu had been appointed president of the AAWC through a postal vote in 1930. Before entering jail in May 1930 for her role in the Indian nationalist civil disobedience movement, she wrote to Cousins unaware that she would end up missing the conference owing to her continued incarceration: 'I am looking forward to it, and I hope I shall be free to attend it and to preside over it also.'⁶² Naidu was well known for her political relationship with Gandhi, as well as for her poetry and oratory skills, and for being well-travelled; she had attended the IWSA conferences in Geneva and Berlin in 1920 and 1929, toured the United States in 1928–1929, and visited Kenya and South Africa as well as frequent visits to Britain. As Naidu was not present, the conference had different presidents for each session. Lady Bandaranaike from Ceylon, Mrs Kamal-ud-din from Afghanistan, Oung from Burma, Mrs Shirin Fozdar from Persia and Miss Hoshi from Japan presided over events in addition to two Indian women, Muthulakshmi Reddi and Shareefah Hamid Ali. The organisation of the AAWC, then, was based upon the modern democratic lines that other international women's organisations enjoyed with attempts to incorporate different speakers and perspectives, and involved speeches, debates and the passing of resolutions. The framework was placed, therefore, for a broader and long-lasting All-Asian women's association to proceed from the first meeting, but the initial set up and ideas had all come from Indian women (and Cousins), and with so few delegates from other Asian countries it would prove difficult for women of other nationalities to feel vested ownership in the endeavour.

Though there were non-Indian presidents many of these women had previous connections to Indian women, in addition to Oung. Fozdar was born in India. Bandaranaike, having presided over the Ceylon Women's Franchise Union who had been successful in 1930 to secure female adult franchise, acknowledged that Cousins and Indian women had been instrumental in the Ceylonese success.⁶³ In her address at the AAWC, Bandaranaike remarked that India was the birthplace of Buddha and viewed as the point of origin for many Ceylonese people, thus asserting India's cultural right to host and dominate the proceedings.⁶⁴ Mrs S. W. Ilangakoon from Ceylon also presented a focus that assumed India was representative of the rest of Asia. Explaining that the matriarchal system was the essence of the East and that family was prioritised as opposed to the individualism of the West, Ilangakoon used her speech to criticise the American Katherine Mayo's book *Mother India* (1927) to assert that Indian women were not chattels.⁶⁵ Mustafa Khan from Persia drew upon pan-Islamic experiences to discuss the issues of purdah and early marriage.⁶⁶ There were, however, attempts by other women to draw the conversations away from Indian examples. Concerns about inheritance rights and polygamy were brought up, along with other issues such as franchise, health, labour and education, which were not problems unique to Asia.

There was no evidence of anti-imperialist rhetoric or rejection of western institutions during the AAWC. The conference was not designed to be political. Delegates were not united by the common enemy of imperialism nor common racial subjection that unified equally composite organisations such as the Pan-African Congresses or PPWA. There was also little consideration of the variation in structures and institutions that the different Asian members had to deal with to enact the kind of social reform the conference was concerned with. One of the main resolutions passed by the AAWC, through the insistent communication from Alice Paul of the US-based National Women's Party (NWP) to Cousins, was to urge Japanese and Persian delegates sitting at the League of Nations in Geneva to support reform for the equality of nationality rights for married women as unmarried women and men.⁶⁷ Although the members did not have equal relationships with the League of Nations, international law was one area that they could all have an input in. At the time there was no uniform international law regarding the nationality of married women; some married women gained the nationality of their husbands, while others did not, with some women finding themselves without any citizenship rights in either the country of their birth or marriage. Women's organisations such as the International Alliance of Women, International Council of Women and NWP were in favour of allowing a married woman the right to choose her nationality.⁶⁸ According to Cousins, it was the resolution on the nationality of married women, and engagement with the League of Nations, that attracted the most press interest into the AAWC, perhaps because it demonstrated the reach of the conference beyond Asia, but also because of the input the NWP had in the resolution.⁶⁹ Although Naidu, in private, did not see much relevance of this agitation to Indian concerns, the AAWC continued to send delegates (all Indian apart from Oung in 1931) to the aforementioned Women's Consultative Committee on Nationality at the League of Nations until at least 1935.⁷⁰ Paul praised the AAWC for sending these telegrams, writing in both the *New York Herald* and *Equal Rights* (the organ of the NWP) that now 'the women of Asia have taken their place in the ranks of the most advanced women of the Occident'.⁷¹

The comment by Paul underlines the supposition that Asian women were inherently less advanced than those in western countries; one that Asian women wished to challenge through the AAWC. An editorial by the American feminist Edith Houghton Hooker for *Equal Rights* in July 1932 reflecting on the publication of the AAWC report was more circumspect:

The report shows that the problems confronting the women of the Far East are identical with those with which their sisters of Europe and the Americas are preoccupied. As Americans we are rather inclined to complacently assume that we are in the vanguard of progress. It is therefore quite pleasantly disillusioning to discover that our sisters in Burma have outstripped us in the race to secure Equal Rights.⁷²

In the same issue, an article on the report also mentioned the 'striking similarity' in the problems that 'confront the women of the East and West' and reflected that 'Feminism, it seems, is not an exclusively European or American manifestation'.⁷³ Hooker continued in her editorial by commending the 'high standing' of the delegates—doctors, social workers, poets, writers and heads of ruling families—failing to acknowledge the social disparity of the region that was not represented. Finally, however, she expressed her admiration for the idealism, nobility and 'deep spirituality' that pervaded the conference,

suggesting that 'discussions were maintained on the high plane', harking back to some of the spiritualist stereotypes of pan-Asianism.⁷⁴

In addition to the resolutions on the nationality of married women, the AAWC passed a number of resolutions relating to social and political equality. The first resolution, however, was to retain 'the high spiritual consciousness that has been the fundamental characteristic of the people of Asia throughout the millenia'.⁷⁵ This resolution echoed Cousins' reflections on the conference, in which she praised the female delegates for the 'high spiritual tone' of their speeches.⁷⁶ The AAWC also resolved that the lives and teachings of great religious leaders should be taught in schools. Other resolutions were in favour of free and compulsory primary education, following the example of Japan; the abolition of child marriage; more money to be spent on health schemes; limited temperance schemes; to rescue children and adults from vice; to regulate labour conditions and to ensure equality of status for men and women (including equal franchise). The final two resolutions were in favour of national self-determination and world peace.⁷⁷ A permanent committee was set up consisting of Oung (Burma), Rajwade (India), Bandaranaike (Ceylon), Fozdar (Persia), Kamal-ud-din (Afghanistan), Hoshi (Japan), Reddi (India) and Naidu (India).⁷⁸ At the end of the conference it was decided that a second would be held in either Japan or Java in 1935, but no future conference took place. Nor did the permanent multi-ethnic committee meet again, as future committee meetings were only held among Indian women.⁷⁹

After the AAWC

Rajwade, organising secretary of the All-India Women's Conference and AAWC, was keen to continue the work of the Committee after the first Conference, but found that there was little support from Indian colleagues such as Naidu and became overwhelmed with domestic concerns. The civil disobedience movement continued to engage the attentions of Indian nationalists and even Cousins was imprisoned in December 1932. Rajwade was concerned that the committee was not representative enough of Asian, and even indeed Indian, experiences.⁸⁰ She wrote to the American Ruth Woodsmall in January 1932 asking for her impressions of the women's movement in Japan, suggesting that 'the Japanese are far in advance of us, but I always feel that they have taken the West as their standard in many things'.⁸¹ Woodsmall, a member of the YWCA and the United Study of Foreign Missions was an apt correspondent as she had shown a great deal of interest in 'Eastern' women. She had worked as a member of a commission on Higher Christian Education in Japan, and a Laymen's Commission conducting a number of interviews with women in Japan, China, Burma and India from 1930 to 1931. Her publications include *Eastern Women: Today and Tomorrow*, published in 1933, and *Moslem Women Enter a New World*, in 1936. Woodsmall had attended the AAWC and delivered an address at the public meeting put on for the non-Asian visitors on 22 January in which she talked about the 'romance' of India for Americans and the awakening of women in the Middle East.⁸²

Perhaps, as Woodsmall suggested, the involvement of Asian women in international organisations was remarkable as it had only been recently that they had broadened their conceptions beyond the family to local and national organisations.⁸³ In addition to the main international female suffrage associations, Woodsmall argued that it was

Christian organisations such as the World's YWCA, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the World's Student Christian Federation that had been most influential in bringing awareness to women beyond their national boundaries.⁸⁴ The WCTU, for example, had formed branches in Burma, China, India, Japan and Korea in the 1880s. Indeed, the WCTU had been influential in establishing connections between India and Japan through the visit of Indian reformer Pandita Ramabai to Japan in 1889, but there is no evidence that these led to any long-lasting feminist Asian networks, or pan-Asian meetings. As Rumi Yasutake has shown, Japanese feminists had stronger, historical connections with and were more likely to work with American feminists than other Asians, and even though early Chinese feminists had studied in Japan, they too were increasingly either utilising American connections or looking inwards rather than engaging with other Asian counterparts.⁸⁵

Woodsmall had, though, observed a sea-change in international conferences that had formerly been populated by western women who spoke about Eastern situations; by the 1930s Eastern women were representing themselves at these gatherings.⁸⁶ The International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship conference held in Istanbul in April 1935 was one such example.

Three women from India (as it happened all three were Moslems), a young woman from Teheran, a number from Egypt, both Moslems and Copts, a large delegation of Syrian women, representing Christians and Moslems, and also a group of students from the American Junior College in Beirut—all these Eastern delegates together with a group of very active Turkish delegates, the total number of Eastern women constituting perhaps half of the Congress, gave one the very definite impression of the active participation of women of the East in international life.⁸⁷

Women from thirty countries attended the triennial conference, presided over by Margery Corbett Ashby, who visited India that same year. Alongside the expected resolutions relating to equality of status such as those connected to labour, suffrage and nationality, the conference included a resolution entitled 'East and West in Co-operation'. Keen to dispel the notion of difference, despite using the terms East and West, the resolution called for greater unity and co-operation between women across the world.⁸⁸

Shareefah Hamid Ali was one of the Indian delegates at the Istanbul Conference and delivered a speech on 'East and West in Co-operation'.⁸⁹ In contrast to the short resolution, Ali talked of 'Asia' as a unified entity, of the solidarity of the 'women of the East' and emphasised the spirituality of the 'East' in her speech: 'For centuries Asia has been the cradle of religions—of spiritual knowledge—of philosophy which gives life a deeper significance.' She explained that 'Oriental Civilisation' was defined by its simplicity and spiritual consciousness, arguing that this simplicity was something Asian women could offer in their international collaboration. She also warned European and American women against any 'arrogant assumption of superiority or patronage' or undue pressure on their religion, government or economic spheres of influence.⁹⁰ With the ability to assert an 'Asian' viewpoint within a larger international conference, and greater participation of Asian women in League of Nations committees and other regional associations in the Pacific and Middle East by the 1930s, it seems that there was less incentive for a solely Asian collective as the decade wore on.

There was no AAWC conference in 1935. With Indian women engaged in domestic nationalist agitations and a weak organisational structure, there was no impetus from other Asian women to continue with the conference. Plans to hold the conference in Java or Japan were constantly postponed, especially once the Istanbul conference was announced. Indian women members, including Cousins, of the Permanent Committee of the AAWC met annually until 1936, discussing among themselves their desire to broaden the representative nature of the conference. It is clear from the Indian committee's records that they had been unable to forge any lasting pan-Asian relationships or campaigns out of the first Conference, as they were upheld trying to find new members and hosts. As no other host country was forthcoming, inevitable when the committee had no members from other Asian countries, there was discussion about holding the second session in India, but this was not seen as suitable for expanding the international reach.⁹¹ It should also be noted that other Asian countries were tied down by other domestic and international concerns in this period too, including the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the 1937 Sino-Japanese war, and then the onset of the Second World War which involved most Asian countries.

It was in India, and organised by Indians again, that a pan-Asian conference was held in 1947 that brought many Asian women together once more. The Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in April 1947 was organised by the Indian Council of World Affairs and had a large number of female delegates. Presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru, and boycotted by the Muslim League, just a few months before Indian independence, the conference was convened to discuss five key issues: Nationalism; Migration; Economic Development; Cultural Problems, and Women Problems.⁹² Female delegates were sent from India, Ceylon, Indonesia, Palestine, Egypt, Burma, Malaya, China, the Philippines, Iran, Korea, Cambodia and Tajikistan. Once again there were obvious omissions from major 'Asian' countries. Among the twelve Indian women who attended, the majority were All-India Women's Conference members including Naidu, Rajwade and Kaur. At the conference, the women proposed to form an Association of Asian Women and revive the All-Asian Women's Conference.⁹³ Yet again, these plans were not realised.

Conclusion

The All-Asian Women's Conference is an example of the agency of non-western women in the interwar period in setting up their own transnational network, shifting the centre away from the metropole. Despite the rhetorical overtures to Oriental civilisation and spiritual traditions, the female organisers demonstrated their modernity by organising a successful, democratic conference. The AAWC brought together women from all over the world, not just Asia, to articulate the concerns and visions of marginalised voices. Yet, despite the evidence of subaltern agency, it had also been overtly conceptualised by a woman, Cousins, who had been brought up in the west. Apart from support for married women nationality rights, there is little evidence that the resolutions at the AAWC had any lasting impact. Further, not only did it lack full geographical representation of women, it also failed to address the socially elite make-up of the conference.

The 1931 AAWC was not the start of a series of meeting for Asian women because the participants were unable to provide a sustainable definition of Asian womanhood and any pan-Asian objectives were overridden by domestic concerns. Indian women had various

competing loyalties to their neighbours, to those who shared colonial subjection under the British, and to the Indians who lived overseas both inside and outside Asia. Similarly, other Asian participants had other competing national, regional and international loyalties. Although it is possible to forge associations out of multiple and competing interests, the participants need to be collectively invested in the aims and mission of the organisation. Dominated by Indian women whose vision of Asia resembled a greater India, beyond a loosely defined 'Oriental' culture, the participants were only bound by an equally loose geography. The AAWC showed that there was potential for Asian women to collectively organise, to think regionally and challenge western hierarchies of feminist organisations. However, despite intentions to decentre international women's organisations, the AAWC was still only led by one dominant group of women (Indians) and was not the long-standing pan-Asian feminist collective it aspired to be.

Notes

1. For example, Leila J. Rupp (1994) Constructing Internationalism: the case of transnational women's organizations, 1888–1945, *The American Historical Review*, 99(5), pp. 1571–1600; (1997) *Worlds of Women: the making of an international women's movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press); Marie Sandell (2015) *The Rise of Women's Transnational Activism: identity and sisterhood between the World Wars* (London: IB Tauris).
2. June Hannam (2005) International Dimensions of Women's Suffrage: 'at the crossroads of several interlocking identities', *Women's History Review*, 14(3/4), pp. 543–560; Mrinalini Sinha, Donna J. Guy & Angela Woollacott (1998) Introduction: why feminisms and internationalism?, *Gender & History*, 10(3), pp. 345–357.
3. Daniel Gorman (2012) *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 3 *et passim*; Thomas Davies (2013) *NGOs: a new history of transnational civil society* (London: Hurst) cites the AAWC as an example of the expansion of transnational civil society beyond Europe, p. 107.
4. Recent scholarship has looked at how the Indian Ocean was an important space of discourse in this period, emphasising the circulation of people, goods and ideas across land and sea in this period, both inside and outside of established imperial routes. See for example Sugata Bose (2006) *A Hundred Horizons: the Indian Ocean in the age of global empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press); Shanti Moorthy & Ashraf Jamal (Eds) (2010) *Indian Ocean Studies: cultural, social, and political perspectives* (New York: Routledge).
5. Davies, *NGOs*, pp. 98–99.
6. Sven Saaler & Christopher W. A. Szpilman (2011) The Emergence of Pan-Asianism as an Ideal of Asian Identity and Solidarity, 1850–2008, in Sven Saaler & Christopher W. A. Szpilman (Eds) *Pan-Asianism: a documentary history, volume 2: 1920–present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), pp. 1–41; Satoshi Mizutani (2015) Anti-Colonialism and the Contested Politics of Comparison: Rabindranath Tagore, Rash Behari Bose and Japanese colonialism in Korea in the inter-war period, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16(1), doi:10.1353/cch.2015.0005.
7. C. M. Stolte & H. Fischer-Tiné (2012) Imagining Asia in India: nationalism and internationalism (ca. 1905–1940), *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5(1), pp. 65–92.
8. Ibid.; see also C. M. Stolte (2012) Bringing Asia to the World: Indian trade unionism and the long road towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–37, *Journal of Global History*, 7(2), pp. 257–278; (2012) 'Enough of the Great Napoleons!' Raja Mahendra Pratap's pan-Asian projects (1929–1939), *Modern Asian Studies*, 46(2), pp. 403–423.
9. Stolte & Fischer-Tiné, 'Imagining Asia in India', p. 91.

10. Louise Edwards & Mina Roces (2004) Introduction: orienting the global women's suffrage movement, in Louise Edwards & Mina Roces (Eds) *Women's Suffrage in Asia: gender, nationalism and democracy* (London: RoutledgeCurzon), pp. 1–23, p. 1.
11. Ellen Carol DuBois (1994) Woman Suffrage Around the World: three phases of suffragist internationalism, in Caroline Daley & Melanie Nolan (Eds) *Suffrage and Beyond: international feminist perspectives* (Auckland: Auckland University Press), pp. 252–274.
12. Kumari Jayawardena (1986) *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books).
13. Edwards & Roces, *Women's Suffrage in Asia*; Louise Roces & Mina Edwards (Eds) (2010) *Women's Movements in Asia: feminisms and transnational activism* (Abingdon: Routledge). It should be further noted that though the AAWC is mentioned in passing by Lenore Lyons, Transnational Networks and Localised Campaigns: the women's movement in Singapore, in Roces & Edwards, *Women's Movements in Asia*, pp. 75–89, p. 77, she mistakenly attributes the date of the AAWC to 1934.
14. Mina Roces (2010) Asian Feminisms: women's movements from the Asian perspective, in Louise Roces & Mina Edwards (Eds) *Women's Movements in Asia: feminisms and transnational activism* (Abingdon: Routledge), pp. 1–18.
15. Antoinette Burton (1994) *Burdens of History: British feminists, Indian women, and imperial culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press).
16. Geraldine Forbes (1998) *Women of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), ch. 3.
17. See Joy Dixon (2001) *Divine Feminine: theosophy and feminism in England* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press), *passim*; C. A. Bayly (2004) *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 365, 479–480; Gauri Viswanathan (1998) *Outside the Fold: conversion, modernity and belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 186–207.
18. Catherine Candy (2009) Mystical Internationalism in Margaret Cousins's Feminist World, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 32, pp. 29–34.
19. Margaret E. Cousins (1922) *The Awakening of Asian Womanhood* (Madras: Ganesh), pp. 1–3.
20. *Ibid.* pp. 147, 150.
21. *Ibid.* pp. 8–12.
22. Margaret E. Cousins, 'Our Special Article: women at home and abroad', *New India*, 24 November 1923, p. 4.
23. Catherine Candy (2001) The Inscrutable Irish-Indian Feminist Management of Anglo-American Hegemony, 1917–1947, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 2(1), para 32.
24. S[warthmore] C[ollege] P[er] C[ollection], Women's International League for Peace and Freedom 1915–1978, India Section. Cousins' circular, December 1929.
25. James H. Cousins & Margaret E. Cousins (1950) *We Two Together* (Madras: Ganesh), pp. 538–539.
26. Catherine Candy (1994) Relating Feminisms, Nationalisms and Imperialisms: Ireland, India and Margaret Cousins's sexual politics, *Women's History Review*, 3(4), pp. 581–594, p. 588.
27. See Brij Tankha, The Greater India Society: Indian culture and an Asian federation, in Saaler & Szpilman, *Pan-Asianism*, pp. 93–96.
28. Susan Bayly (2004) Imagining 'Greater India': French and Indian visions of colonialism in the Indic mode, *Modern Asian Studies*, 38(3), pp. 703–744, p. 706.
29. Prasenjit Duara (2010) Asia Redux: conceptualizing a region for our times, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69 (4), pp. 963–983, p. 973.
30. Stephen N. Hay (1970) *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and his critics in Japan, China and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), pp. 312, 315.
31. Birendra Prasad (1979) *Indian Nationalism and Asia (1900–1947)* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing), pp. 174–176.
32. Ten Indian women attended the 1920 IWSA in Geneva.
33. Sinha, Guy & Woollacott, 'Introduction', p. 351.
34. Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, pp. 52–53, 75, 58, 80.

35. DuBois & Haleh Emrani (2008) A Speech by Nour Hamada: Tehran, 1932, *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 4(1), pp. 107–124, p. 111.
36. Rumi Yasutake (2011) The Rise of Women's Internationalism in the Countries of the Asia-Pacific Region during the Interwar Years, from a Japanese Perspective, *Women's History Review*, 20(4), pp. 521–532.
37. Fiona Paisley (2009) *Glamour in the Pacific: cultural internationalism and race politics in the women's Pan-Pacific* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), p. 52.
38. Ibid. Introduction.
39. Sandell, *The Rise of Women's Transnational Activism*, p. 204.
40. Vir Talwar (1990) Feminist Consciousness in Women's Journals in Hindi, 1910–1920, in Kumkum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid (Eds) *Recasting Women: essays in Indian colonial history* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), pp. 204–232, p. 216.
41. See Chie Ikeya (2011) *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), ch. 3.
42. British Library, I[ndia] O[ffice] R[ecords], Mss Eur D1230/1, Papers of Sybil Mary Dorothy Bulkeley, National Council of Women in Burma 1927.
43. IOR, Mss Eur D1230/3, NCWB Third Annual Report 1928.
44. League of Nations Archives, Geneva, 3E/ Legal, Codification of International Law, file 25712/ Series 25640, Nationality of Married Women: consultation of feminist organisations, (Council) resolution of January 24 1931. See also N[ehru] M[emorial] M[useum &] L[ibrary], All India Women's Conference Papers, Microfilm 1, File 11, Oung to Reddi, 19 April 1931.
45. Daw Mya Sein (February 1958) The Women of Burma: a tradition of hard work and independence, *Atlantic Monthly*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1958/02/the-women-of-burma/306822/> (accessed 14 August 2015); Mya Sein (October 1972) Towards Independence in Burma: the role of women, *Asian Affairs*, 3(3), pp. 288–299.
46. Mya Sein's Speeches at the Burma Round Table Conference 1931, in Hans-Bernd Zöllner (Ed.) (2011) Myanmar Literature Project. Working Paper No. 10:18. Two books on sex and gender (Druck: Universität Passau), p. 67. My thanks to Jonathan Saha for this reference and copy of the working paper.
47. IOR, M/1/181, Status of Women under New Constitution (1933).
48. Ikeya (2005/6) The 'Traditional' High Status of Women in Burma: a historical reconsideration, *Journal of Burma Studies*, 10, pp. 51–81.
49. A[ll] A[sian] W[omen's] C[onference] Report (Bombay: Times of India Press, 1931), p. 11; Women and India: All Asian Women's Conference, *Pax International*, 6(2), December 1930.
50. AAWC Report, p. 8.
51. Sandell, *The Rise of Women's Transnational Activism*, p. 190; Marie Sandell (2011) 'A Real Meeting of the Women of the East and the West': women and internationalism in the interwar period, in Daniel Laqua (Ed.) *Internationalism Reconfigured: transnational ideas and movements between the world wars* (London: IB Tauris), pp. 161–185, pp. 175–176.
52. 'Justice for Women Urged in Far East', *Equal Rights*, 2 July 1932, p. 174.
53. Ruth Woodsmall (1933) *Eastern Women: today and tomorrow* (Boston: Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions), p. 90.
54. Margaret E. Cousins, 'Women in Conference: the All-Indian and All-Asian conferences contrasted', *Modern Review*, March 1931, p. 326.
55. *New India*, 3 April 1930, in Centre for Modern Indian Studies, Göttingen, Monthly Reports of India Branch of International Labour Organisation, April 1930.
56. AAWC Report, p. 8.
57. All-Asian Women's Conference in India, *Indian Magazine and Review*, 678 (November 1930), p. 136.
58. AAWC Report, p. vii.
59. Ibid. pp. 22–24.
60. Ibid. pp. i–ii.
61. Ibid. p. viii.

62. Cousins & Cousins, *We Two Together*, p. 538.
63. See 'Ceylon Women's Movement', *Stri Dharma*, (7) (May 1930), p. 294.
64. AAWC Report, p. 28.
65. Ibid. p. 38. Men and women, from inside and outside India, had been vociferous critics of Mayo's book since its publication in 1927, and so the book was not on the agenda at the conference despite Ilangakoon's intervention. For more on *Mother India* controversy and reaction see Mrinalini Sinha (2006) *Specters of Mother India: the global restructuring of an empire* (Durham: Duke University Press), ch. 3.
66. AAWC Report, p. 41.
67. Margaret E. Cousins, 'Asian Women Influence League of Nations', *Times of India*, 24 February 1931, p. 4.
68. See Candice Lewis Bredbenner (1998) *A Nationality of Her Own: women, marriage and law of citizenship* (Berkeley: University of California Press), ch. 6 & epilogue; Katarina Leppänen (2009) The Conflicting Interests of Women's Organizations and the League of Nations on the Question of Married Women's Nationality in the 1930s, *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 17(4), pp. 240–255, for more on this issue.
69. Cousins, 'Asian Women Influence League of Nations'; Margaret E. Cousins, 'The All-Asian Conference', *Equal Rights*, 5 September 1931, p. 245.
70. NMML, AIWC Microfilm 1, file 11, Reddi to Rajwade, 6 July 1931; AIWC Microfilm 7, file 89: All Asian Women's Conference.
71. *New York Herald*, 27 January 1931, quoted in Margaret E. Cousins, 'Asian Women Influence League of Nations'; 'Asian Women Demand Equality', *Equal Rights*, 14 February 1931, p. 12.
72. 'East is West', *Equal Rights*, 2 July 1932, p. 170.
73. 'Justice for Women Urged in the Far East'.
74. 'East is West'.
75. AAWC Report, p. 142.
76. Margaret E. Cousins, 'The Asian Union', *Stri Dharma*, February 1931, p. 158.
77. AAWC Report, pp. 142–144.
78. SCPC, WILPF India Section, AAWC Interim Report, 6 February 1931.
79. Cousins & Cousins, *We Two Together*, p. 540.
80. NMML, AIWC Microfilm 1, File 11, Correspondence between Reddi and Rajwade 1931.
81. S[ophia] S[mith] C[ollection], Smith College, Northampton MA, Ruth Frances Woodsmall Papers, correspondence box 15, folder 44, Rajwade to Woodsmall, 23 January 1932.
82. AAWC Report, p. 117.
83. Woodsmall, *Eastern Women*, p. 82.
84. Ibid. p. 87.
85. Rumi Yasutake (2004) *Transnational Women's Activism: the United States, Japan, and Japanese immigrant communities in California, 1859–1920* (New York: New York University Press), p. 59; Louise Edwards (2000) Women's Suffrage in China: challenging scholarly conventions, *Pacific Historical Review*, 69(4), pp. 617–638; see also Ellen Carol DuBois (2000) Woman Suffrage: the view from the Pacific, *Pacific Historical Review*, 69(4), pp. 539–551, p. 547.
86. Woodsmall (1936) *Moslem Women Enter a New World* (London: George Allen & Unwin), p. 370.
87. Ibid. pp. 370–371.
88. International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (1935) *Report of the Twelfth Congress, Istanbul, April 18th–24th 1935* (London), p. 19. Note that the conference also had specific resolutions relating to Indian female suffrage and nationality in Egypt.
89. Hamid Ali had been treasurer of the All-India Women's Conference, was a permanent member of the AAWC, and had been involved in a women's delegation to the Joint Select Committee on Indian Reforms in London in 1933.
90. SSC, International Alliance of Women Papers, box 3, folder 2, Shareefah Hamid Ali (1935) East and West in Co-operation. For further discussion on the Orientalising tendencies of the

IWSA see Charlotte Weber (2001) Unveiling Scheherazade: feminist orientalism in the International Alliance of Women, 1911–1950, *Feminist Studies*, 27(1), pp. 125–157.

91. NMML, AIWC Papers, Microfilm 7, file 89, AAWC (1934–1936).
92. The Inter-Asian Relations Conference, *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 37(147) (1947), pp. 237–243.
93. Asian Relations Conference, *International Women's News*, 41(9) (1947), pp. 123–125.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Daniel Grey and Jonathan Saha for valuable comments on a draft version of this article, and to the editor and anonymous reviewers of this journal.

Funding

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/M004236/1].

Notes on contributor

Sumita Mukherjee is AHRC Research Fellow in the History Department at King's College London. Her current project is entitled 'Indian Suffragettes: networks, transnationalism and international feminism, 1918–1950'. She is the author of *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities: the England-returned* (Routledge, 2010) and editor, with Rehana Ahmed, of *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858–1947* (Continuum, 2012).